

CMS/CTAC LEAP Initiative

High School Challenge and Its Implications for Years One and Two Teacher Incentive Fund Differentiated Compensation Payout

Updated October 26, 2007

1. Introduction / Background

During the past two months, CTAC has worked closely with the LEAP Steering Committee and district staff to begin to concretize the details of Year 1 implementation and set up the structures for project planning and governance to guide the pilot development through the 5-year period.

It is during this time that a potential issue was raised by Steering Committee members. Project rollout to the schools was put on hold until it could be determined if there was indeed a problem, and if so, to determine an appropriate remedy. The concern is that the "High School Challenge" program, a program that includes staff recruitment and retention components and that is funded through resources other than federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant dollars, was rolled out to the four high schools in the LEAP Year 1 cohort in a manner that is inconsistent with the planned involvement of those schools in the LEAP initiative during years 1 and 2.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is an extremely large district grappling with significant student achievement challenges. A variety of programs and initiatives are constantly being developed to address the many challenges – in specific classrooms, at individual schools, regionally and districtwide. It is easy to understand how, in the day-to-day reality of a large and complex district, the details of the High School Challenge program, its rollout plan and communication strategies, were not fully understood by the CMS grant design team, nor were they communicated to CTAC at the time of grant development. In fact, the lack of a coordinated, comprehensive, performance-based compensation system is a key problem that was identified in the LEAP Teacher Incentive Fund grant proposal; and we are witnessing a complication of this piecemeal approach. The LEAP initiative design includes a progression of planning and evaluation activities, scheduled throughout the 5-year initiative, engaging key stakeholders and supported by Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC), toward the development and scale-up of a comprehensive system for teacher/principal compensation.

2. Statement of Issue

The LEAP Initiative has several objectives: to reward educators for excellent achievement of students; to use financial incentives to recruit and retain fully certified, excellent teachers in the LEAP schools; to reward teachers and principals who engage in professional development activities based on district needs and priorities; and to build the capacity of the district to create the systems that help educators raise student achievement and success.

To arrive at a comprehensive compensation system that achieves the LEAP objectives (versus a disconnected array of programs), the LEAP initiative design takes into account that the first year program would begin to establish the *pathway* toward that system. The new system would be created over the five-year period *by* teachers, principals and other stakeholders, not done *to* them.

The intent of LEAP was to start with a compensation payout for teachers and principals, in a way that would be transitional. The Year 1 compensation package was based on criteria that would be recognizable to teachers and principals in the district, given the district's past experimentation with performance-based pay, yet also tied to the district's new strategic plan goals for student achievement. Through the involvement of teachers, principals and administrators, and based on feedback from ongoing research, it is intended that mid-course corrections will shape the new compensation system at the pilot schools, providing proven results for district implementation.

beyond the 5-year pilot. Given the interest expressed by teachers, principals and administrators, a major improvement to be considered in the development of the pilot in Years 2-5 is the inclusion of student achievement growth indicators as criterion for performance-based pay.

The original LEAP design included four high-need high schools among the six Year-1 pilot schools. However, these four high schools were also named as participants of the High School Challenge, funded by Mecklenburg County. The High School Challenge program, which began this fall, includes commitments to school staff that for the 2007-8 school year they will each receive 15% supplemental pay as a recruitment/retention bonus, and that in 2008-9 they will receive supplemental pay for meeting specific student achievement threshold criteria. Beyond 2008-9, there is no specific commitment.

Inclusion of these 4 high schools in the LEAP pilot as well as the High School Challenge during Year 1 and/or Year 2 of LEAP poses the following concerns:

Year 1 / 2007-8: Since the High School Challenge program has already been committed and rolled out to schools, two options for inclusion of those schools in Year 1 LEAP were considered by LEAP leaders: 1) Offer the High School Challenge bonus to the four high schools and not the LEAP bonuses and merit-based pay, while offering the LEAP bonuses and merit-based pay only to the other two pilot schools; or 2) Offer the LEAP bonuses and merit-based pay plus the High School Challenge bonus to the four high schools and offer the LEAP bonuses and merit-based pay to the two other schools. Both options, however, create a compensation package that is inconsistent with the LEAP grant proposal, raises questions of equitability, and significantly complicates the team's ability to conduct pilot project research.

Year 2 / 2008-9: The intent of LEAP is that the Year 1 process of planning and input from stakeholders will allow for mid-course corrections that improve the LEAP initiative design going into Year 2 and beyond. Important among the improvements to be considered is the use of indicators of student achievement growth, versus the current threshold measures, as part of the performance-based pay criteria. However, it was learned that the High School Challenge program promises performance-based pay in 2008-9 based on threshold measures. Therefore, it would be impossible to honor LEAP's intent to make compensation system improvements in Year 2 at the four high schools, if a significantly different performance-based pay program has already been set in stone.

3. Recommended Solution

Based on the findings, it is not appropriate to include the four high schools in either Years 1 and/or 2 of the LEAP pilot. Consequently, LEAP leaders considered other options and determined that the most appropriate solution is to change the order of schools entering the pilot. By delaying the entry of the four high schools into the pilot until Year 3, the High School Challenge program commitments will have ended, and the schools will be ready to participate in LEAP. To accommodate this change, the district can accelerate the entry of the schools that were initially scheduled to enter the LEAP pilot in years 2-3, into years 1-2. LEAP leaders determined this solution to be the most appropriate of the options considered, remaining faithful to the original LEAP goals and project scope over the five year period.

The following chart details the change in order, agreed to by the LEAP Steering Committee:

Original Order of Schools Added to the Pilot	Proposed Revised Order of Entry
Year 1: <i>E. E Waddell High</i> <i>Garinger High</i> <i>West Charlotte High</i> <i>West Mecklenburg High</i> Billingsville Elementary Wilson Middle	Year 1: Billingsville Elementary Wilson Middle Martin Luther King Middle Sedgefield Middle Shamrock Gardens Elementary Spaugh Middle
Year 2: Martin Luther King Middle Sedgefield Middle Shamrock Gardens Elementary Spaugh Middle	Year 2: Druid Hills Elementary Highland Renaissance Elementary J.T. Williams Middle Reid Park Elementary
Years 3-4: Druid Hills Elementary Highland Renaissance Elementary J.T. Williams Middle Reid Park Elementary Berryhill Elementary Lincoln Heights Elementary	Years 3-4: <i>E. E Waddell High</i> <i>Garinger High</i> <i>West Charlotte High</i> <i>West Mecklenburg High</i> Berryhill Elementary Lincoln Heights Elementary